

[Call for Abstracts: Purity and Power: Literary Interventions in Logics of Hierarchy](#)

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Call for Papers

Date:

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Location:

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Subject Fields:

Cultural History / Studies, Humanities, Indigenous Studies, World History / Studies

Chairs: Katherine Preston, Brown University; Goutam Piduri, Brown University

For Northeast MLA's Annual Convention, Boston, March 5-8, 2020. What is the relationship between purity and power? The normative valuation of purity may be rooted in religion. In fact, purification rituals and instruction that link purity to transcendence come close to a universal feature of religiosity. Yet purity or "purism" is also thoroughly political, as Alexis Shotwell shows in her book *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times*. Shotwell's analysis shows that purity legitimates the disavowal of complicity in ecological, colonial, and other systemic crimes. Purity attends conceptions of various identities, including caste, class, race, gender, and sexuality, inheres in constructions of deviant to moral behavior, and activates disgust as a politically mobilizing agent. Discourses of purity and power reappear in the corporate pollution that disproportionately affects already marginalized communities. How do logics of hierarchy based in purity mobilize discourses of relative hygiene and disgust, whether moral, physical, spiritual, environmental, or otherwise, in the service of power? How does literature articulate and contest the conceptualization of purity, perhaps in the representation of mixture or the exposition of the uncomfortable fact that, in Shotwell's words, "everyone is implicated in situations we (at least in some way) repudiate"? How does purity relate to literary forms, and how might literature negotiate a critical valuation of "pure" form? Do experimental or "hybrid" forms help us recognize or reconceive hierarchies of power or valuation within literary studies itself? Papers may draw on affect theory, ethics, political theory, critical race theory, and Dalit studies.

Please send 250-300 word abstracts at <https://www.cfplist.com/nemla/Home/S/17987> by September 30, 2019.

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